



Imagining Mount Athos: Visions of a Holy Place, from Homer to World War II

Veronica della Dora

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For more than one thousand years the monastic republic of Mount Athos has been one of the most chronicled and yet least accessible places in the Mediterranean. Difficult to reach until the last century and strictly restricted to male visitors only, the Holy Mountain of Orthodoxy has been known in the Eastern Christian world and in western Europe more through representation than through direct experience.

Most writing on Athos has focused on its Byzantine history and sacred heritage. *Imagining Mount Athos* uncovers a set of alternative and largely unexplored perspectives, equally important in the mapping and dissemination of Athos in popular imagination. The author considers Mount Athos as the site of pre-Christian myths of Renaissance and Enlightenment scholarship, of shelter for Allied refugees during the Second World War, and of a botanical and sociological laboratory for early-twentieth-century scientists. Each chapter considers a different narrative channel through which Athos has entered Orthodox and western European imagination: the mythical, the utopian, the sacred, the scholarly, the geopolitical, and the scientific.

Della Dora has assembled a wealth of unique textual, visual, and oral materials without ever having had the opportunity to visit this holy place. In this sense, in addition to making an important contribution to existing scholarship on Mount Athos, the book adds to current theoretical debates in cultural geography and humanities generally about the circulation of knowledge.

Imagining Mount Athos's appeal is international and spans Hellenic studies, cultural geography, environmental history, cultural history, religious studies, history of cartography, and art history. The book will be of interest to scholars as well as to a general audience interested in this unique place and its fascinating history.

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